

Hard on the Problem, Soft on the People: North Carolina Engages Communities in Implementing Smoke-Free Housing

N.C. Chronic Disease and Injury Section 2017

Summary

On February 3, 2017, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced that all Public Housing Authorities (PHA) must comply with its smoke-free public housing rule by July 30, 2018. The use of all lit tobacco products and hookahs (or water pipes) inside all units, common areas, Public Housing Authority (PHA) administrative offices, and in all areas within 25 feet of buildings is prohibited. The initiative will help improve the health of more than 2 million public housing residents across the U.S., including 760,000 children. Smoke-free public housing reduces exposure to harmful secondhand smoke. The NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (TPCB) is working with local public health to assist public housing to educate and prepare residents for their smoke-free housing policies.

Challenge: According to HUD’s Resident Characteristic Report, people of color are disproportionately represented in public housing; this is even more so in our state. In N.C., 78% of public housing heads of households are black compared to 45% in the U.S. To better understand why these disparities persist, the Chronic Disease and Injury Section participated in Racial Equity Institute (REI) Training. The REI training provides context and history about how racially discriminatory policies and the unequal distribution of wealth in this country contribute to inequities we see in social determinants of health like housing. The Truth Initiative recently launched a media campaign sharing the data that there are up to 10 times more tobacco ads in black neighborhoods than in other neighborhoods. Studies also show that products like little cigars and cigarillos are cheaper in neighborhoods with a higher density of black residents. Given these challenges, along with the recognition that tobacco use is an addiction, TPCB’s approach to engage residents of public and affordable housing has been to discuss how smoke-free policies protect everyone from the dangers of secondhand smoke. Public health staff are encouraged to listen to residents and empower them to think about how they will manage the change during listening sessions and resident meetings. When residents’ voices are heard, it helps open the door for health educators to offer resources and education about ways to quit tobacco use.

Solution: While awaiting the release of the final rule, TPCB began offering the Helping Our Neighbors train-the-trainer webinar series for public health staff. The webinars, held monthly from October 2016 – April 2017, teach how to use community engagement principles to involve public housing residents and staff in the process of going smoke-free. An in-person training is being held April 24-25 in Charlotte in which participants will conduct a site visit to Charlotte Housing Authority and participate in skill building sessions. Michael Scott, Network Coordinator for the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network (NAATPN) will provide training on “Pathways to Freedom,” a tailored tobacco cessation resource for African Americans. The TPCB also offered a webinar for affordable and public housing operators to aid in the process of going smoke-free. Nearly 60 webinar participants learned about best practices for implementing smoke-free housing policies and available resources from state and local health departments. Participants also heard lessons learned from smoke-free housing leaders that can be applied to other housing sites that are going smoke free.



Solution (continued): TPCB state and regional staff also conducted educational presentations at the NC Housing Authorities Directors' Association (NC HADA) Annual Meeting in September 2016.

Results: As a result of the technical assistance provided at housing industry conferences and for PHA's statewide, NC HADA has decided that all North Carolina Public Housing Authorities will adopt a smoke-free policy prior to the HUD effective date of July 30, 2018. At least 13 public housing authorities in N.C. have already implemented a smoke-free policy covering at least one of their buildings, and leaders of some of those properties have shared their lessons-learned with other sites. TPCB continues to hear success stories of residents who quitting tobacco because of smoke-free policies.

Sustaining Success: The TPCB has a robust smokefreehousingnc.com website full of resources for housing owners, managers and residents. Housing operators can download smoke-free housing flyers for residents, tips on policy implementation and enforcement, and success stories from other housing leaders. Regional Managers and health educators across the state will continue to provide technical assistance during this process by assisting with compliance issues and educating staff about cessation resources. Ways for housing managers to sustain success include: 2) posting clear signage, 2) routinely making quit tobacco resources available on site, 3) getting housing staff trained to offer cessation classes for their residents, and 4) identifying community resources like hospitals that may partner to create healthier communities.

Get Involved: To view the Helping Our Neighbor webinars and download the presentations visit, the [smoke-free page](#) of N.C. Alliance for Health site Topics include: Preparing for HUD's Smoke-Free Housing Rule, Implicit Bias

and Cultural Competency and Community Engagement and Cultural Humility, and the Spirit of Motivational Interviewing. TPCB partnered with the NC Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities and NAATPN, Inc. to offer the series.



After attending a Listening Session at his affordable housing property: *“The smoke-free policy is part of why I’m going to quit smoking. If quitting is going to improve my health, that’s a big plus!”* William M., N.C. Resident

Contact:

Pam Diggs, MPH, Director of Local Program Development and Regulations
Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch, NC Division of Public Health
1932 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1932
919-707-5407

Pamela.Diggs@dhhs.nc.gov

State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services
Chronic Disease and Injury Section
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